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# Gallatin City-County Health Department

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## Handling Dairy Products, Cheese, and Eggs Safely

### General Safety Tips for Dairy Products, Cheese, and Eggs

- Make the dairy aisle one of the last stops in your shopping trip so the items you choose do not become warm in your cart.
- Make sure dairy products\* and eggs are cold when you select them.
- Examine containers for leaks or other damage.
- Check "sell by" dates. The "sell by" date is the last date a product should be offered for sale. This date allows you a reasonable length of time to use the food at home. Some products may also include "best if used by" information. This is the last day the manufacturer expects the product to be good to eat or drink.
- Go directly home from the market and refrigerate your purchases as soon as possible. If traveling longer than 30 minutes, place your dairy products, cheese, and eggs in a cooler with ice.
- After using dairy products, close the containers tightly.
- Don't allow dairy products, including raw eggs, to remain at room temperature for longer than necessary - never more than 2 hours.
- Some types of cheese require constant refrigeration and others do not. In general, cheese with high moisture content, such as ricotta or mozzarella, should not be left out of refrigeration for longer than 2 hours.

We realize that "dairy products" is a pretty broad term. On this page, when we say "dairy products" we are referring to milk, cream, half and half, butter, yogurt, sour cream, and cream cheese.

### Dairy Products

In general, dairy products are pasteurized to eliminate bacteria and make them safe to drink or eat. (Raw milk cheese may be aged 60 days instead of being pasteurized.) After pasteurization, it is important for all dairy products to remain under constant refrigeration to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Take these precautions when shopping and at home.

- Don't drink any beverages or eat any foods that contain unpasteurized milk.
- Keep milk and milk products refrigerated.
- Shelf-stable milk can be stored at room temperature due to a special processing system. Refrigerate after opening.
- Don't return unused milk, cream, or other dairy products to their original containers.
- Opened butter should be covered in the refrigerator.
- Before freezing butter, wrap each package tightly in foil or plastic.

## Dairy Products Storage Chart

| Product                      | Keep Refrigerated |
|------------------------------|-------------------|
| Milk, opened                 | 5 days            |
| Half and Half, opened        | 10 days           |
| Light or heavy cream, opened | 10 days           |
| Sour Cream, opened           | 2 to 4 weeks      |
| Yogurt, opened               | 7 to 10 days      |
| Yogurt, unopened, frozen     | 6 weeks           |
| Butter, opened               | 1 to 2 weeks      |
| Butter, frozen               | 6 to 9 months     |
| Margarine, opened            | 4 to 6 months     |

## Raw Eggs

Eggs (like meats, fish and poultry) may contain harmful bacteria that grow rapidly at room temperature. Proper cooking, however, destroys the bacteria. Follow these safe storage, handling, and cooking procedures to keep your family safe.

### Buying & Storing Eggs

- Buy only refrigerated eggs and keep them refrigerated.
- Make sure the eggs are clean and the shells are not cracked.
- Store eggs in their original carton - not in the refrigerator door where temperatures tend to be warmer than the recommended 40°F.
- Washing eggs before storing is unnecessary.
- Use raw eggs within 3 to 5 weeks for best quality.
- Eggs may be frozen for future use (within 1 year), but do not freeze eggs in their shells. Beat yolks and whites together to freeze whole eggs; egg whites can also be frozen.

### Cooking With Eggs

- Wash hands, utensils, food preparation areas, and equipment with hot, soapy water before and after they come in contact with raw eggs.
- Keep raw eggs separate from other foods, especially those that will not be cooked.
- When preparing cakes, pies, or cookies, do not taste the batter, filling, or dough if it contains raw eggs (or use pasteurized eggs).
- For recipes calling for eggs that are raw or undercooked when the dish is served - for example, Caesar salad dressing or egg-based homemade ice cream- use either pasteurized shell eggs or pasteurized egg products.
- Cook eggs thoroughly until both the yolk and white are firm, not runny, and scramble until there is no visible liquid egg.

## Egg Cooking Chart

| Egg Type                 | Cook for  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Scrambled eggs           | 1 minute at 250°F (medium-high heat)                          |
| Poached eggs             | 5 minutes in boiling water                                    |
| Hard-cooked eggs         | 7 minutes in boiling water                                    |
| Sunnyside eggs           | 7 minutes uncovered or 4 minutes covered at 250°F             |
| Fried and over-easy eggs | 3 minutes at 250°F on one side, then 2 minutes on the other   |
| Sauces or custards       | Bring to 160°F and cook until the mixture coats a metal spoon |
| Quiches or casseroles    | Bring to 160°F and bake until a knife comes out clean         |
| Meringue                 | Bake at 350°F for at least 15 minutes                         |

## Serving Eggs Safely

- Serve cooked eggs and egg-containing foods immediately after cooking.
- Eggs and egg dishes may be refrigerated for serving later but should be thoroughly reheated to 165°F before serving.
- Use hard-cooked eggs (in the shell or peeled) within 1 week.
- Consume egg dishes within 3 to 4 days.
- When dyeing hard-boiled eggs for holiday decorations or Easter egg hunts, consider making separate batches for eating and display or hiding. Under no circumstances should eggs be consumed after being left unrefrigerated for more than 2 hours.
- If taking cooked eggs to work or school, pack them with a small frozen gel pack or a frozen juice box.

## Cheese

Although there are many different types of cheeses, some general safety guidelines apply.

- Refrigerate solid cheese in its original wrap until opened. After opening, rewrap the cheese tightly in moisture proof wrap, such as foil, or place in an airtight container. (If concerned about the plasticizer in cling wrap, you may wish to transfer your cheese to foil or an airtight container as soon as you get it home.)
- Buy only pasteurized cheese or hard cheeses marked "aged 60 days" (or longer) if unpasteurized milk is used.
- If mold is visible on solid cheese, trim it off, along with a half inch piece around it. (Cheese ripened with harmless mold, such as blue cheese, is an exception.) Discard all soft cheese, such as cottage cheese, when mold is visible.
- Serve cheese at the recommended serving temperature, which varies according to type. Do not leave moist cheese, such as ricotta or mozzarella, out of the refrigerator for longer than 2 hours.

- Hard natural cheese can be frozen if wrapped tightly in plastic in sections of 1 pound or less and 1-inch thick. It will keep for about 6 to 8 weeks. Thaw cheese in the refrigerator and use within a few days. Since the texture is affected, previously frozen cheese is best used in cooked dishes.
- Due to a potentially harmful bacterium, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration advises pregnant women, the elderly, and people with weakened immune systems to refrain from eating soft cheeses such as feta, Brie, Camembert, blue-veined, and Mexican-style cheeses.

### Cheese Storage Chart

| <b>Cheese Type</b>   | <b>Keep Refrigerated</b> |
|--|--------------------------|
| Cottage cheese, opened   | <i>10–30 days</i>        |
| Cream or Neufchatel cheese, opened                               | <i>2 weeks</i>           |
| Hard or wax coated cheeses (such as cheddar, Edam, Gouda, Swiss) |                          |
| unopened   | <i>3 to 6 months</i>     |
| opened   | <i>3 to 4 weeks</i>      |
| sliced   | <i>2 weeks</i>           |
| Ricotta cheese, opened   | <i>five days</i>         |
| Processed cheese food products                                   | <i>3 to 4 weeks</i>      |

### Sources

1. Partnership for Food Safety Education — a public-private coalition of industry, government and consumer groups dedicated to educating the public about safe food handling to help reduce food-borne illness.
2. Food Marketing Institute — a non-profit association conducting programs in research, education, and public affairs on behalf of retailers, wholesalers and consumers.
3. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service